



MAYOR DEKE COPENHAVER

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Re: Mayor calls for federal HIV/AIDS program to better serve minorities

Joins minority health advocates in raising visibility of HIV problem in black community and demanding "fair treatment" for all HIV patients

(CITY HALL) – There are two little-known facts about HIV/AIDS: 1. Because of better drug treatment, HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence; and 2. Black Americans are nevertheless dying because few people know 70% of all new HIV infections are in the black community –leading to untreated infections that later develop into full-blown AIDS.

That is why Augusta Mayor Deke Copenhaver today joined African-American health advocates in calling for greater awareness of the problem of HIV/AIDS in the black community. He also joined them in calling on Congress to reauthorize the federal law that provides funding for treatment of low-income HIV patients – and to “modernize” the law to recognize that the vast majority of current HIV/AIDS patients are African-American.

“70% of new HIV/AIDS patients are African-American,” said Mayor Copenhaver. “HIV/AIDS is no longer a gay male big-city disease, and we must highlight this problem in the community and get federal treatment programs to recognize the new reality of AIDS in America.”

The federal law that provides treatment for low-income HIV patients is named the “Ryan White CARE AIDS Act,” named for the Indiana boy who died in the 1980’s from AIDS transmitted by a blood transfusion. Currently, this law gives preferential financial treatment to “legacy cities” which historically have had high gay male populations.

However, as HIV/AIDS has spread into new parts of the country – and particularly exploded in the black community – the Ryan White Act has not changed to reflect these new realities. This has led to a national effort, supported by the Mayor, to “modernize” the Ryan White Act to ensure all low-income HIV patients get the same level of support regardless of race or location.

The mayor was joined at his press conference by Dr. Gary Puckrein of the National Minority Health Month Foundation, who is traveling the country to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in the black community and to urge Congress to modernize the Ryan White Act. In addition, State Sen. Ed Tarver and City Commissioner Joe Bowles also attended the event.

“The black community must wake up to the danger of HIV/AIDS, and we must contact Congress and urge it to modernize the Ryan White Act as it reauthorizes the legislation this year,” said Dr. Puckrein. “If we lose our chance now, we will have to wait another five years to get fair treatment for all people suffering from HIV/AIDS.”

Currently, the bill to reauthorize the Act is in the U.S. Senate Health Committee awaiting action. Those who are interested in this issue are urged to contact Sen. Johnny Isakson and Sen. Saxby Chambliss and ask for their support of reauthorization and modernization of the Ryan White Act.

